

Roland Comtois' Journey to Italy 2019



St. Francis Pilgrimage: A Personal Spiritual Experience & More: St. Francis, Food, Wine, Art & Culture
Co-Host: Bobbi Parlett, Simpatico, Italy's Finest, St. Michaels, MD

September 28th – Oct. 7th 2019

For Trip Information contact: Bobbi Parlett 610-209-5409; bmparlett@aol.com

Roland shares his enlightening spiritual insight as we follow the footsteps of St. Francis and experience this once in a lifetime opportunity to tour the “Real Italy” together. We will visit significant places in St. Francis’ life, deepen our spiritual connections, experience the culture and beauty of the landscape, enjoy the incredible food and wine, and make lasting friendships. Roland will lead daily inspirational discussions, prayers along our journey, and offer channeling during our trip.

Day 1 Sept. 28th, Saturday – Group meets at the [Hilton Rome Airport](#); Via Arturo Ferrarin 2 Fiumicino, Rome, 00054, Italy TEL: +39-06-65258 FAX: +39-06-6525 6525. This hotel connects to the Rome Airport. You may want to consider arriving a day early if you are prone to jet lag, and stay at the Hilton. Then you will already be at the hotel for our meeting point. For those arriving the morning of the 28th, please plan air travel to arrive at the Rome Fiumicino airport around 9 AM. Most overnight flights from the east coast arrive in this time frame. You will be able to rest on the bus while we travel to our first stop in Tuscany.

We will then depart from the Hilton Rome Airport about **10:15 AM Local Time**, and drive north towards Cetona, Tuscany.

- 1:00 PM Lunch at Osteria del Merlo in Cetona, just over the border into Tuscany, officially one of the most beautiful towns in Italy ("I Borghi più belli d'Italia"). “Merlo” means Blackbird in Italian, so this is a special place to kick off our tour. Blackbird is a symbol of intuition and clairvoyance. Since blackbirds are considered wise, but mysterious, they also symbolize human intuition. If you choose a blackbird to be your spirit animal, it would bring your intuition to perfection. What is your symbol-totem? After lunch, we will have **Free Time** to enjoy this beautiful town, which offers many photo opportunities, shopping and artist studios.

5:00 PM We drive towards Cortona to arrive about 6 PM, check in for our first night in the city centre at Hotel Italia (<https://www.hotelitaliacortona.com/en/>). Cortona is well known for the location of the “Under the Tuscan Sun” author’s Francis Mayes’ home, and significant with St. Francis for the Celle di Cortona where his spiritual presence is everywhere in the Celle area.

Free Time until dinner in town at 8:00 PM at Locanda al Pozzo Antico, a short walk from the hotel.

Day 2, Sept. 29th, Sunday – 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM We will walk a few minutes to the Chiesa San Francesco, one of the most historical churches in Cortona. The recently restored church was built in the 13th century on the ruins of Roman thermal baths. It was built by Brother Elias, the head of the Franciscan order and the successor of Saint Francis. His tomb as well as the tomb of Luca Signorelli, the famous painter from Cortona, are preserved inside the church, which is located very near the central square. Inside there are various works of art & relics including a fragment of the Holy Cross -- the one on which Jesus was crucified - which is now part of the altar, brought by Brother Elias from Constantinople. There are also St. Francis's tunic, bible and pillow are in the church. Then we will have some **Free Time** to explore the town.

10:30 AM We will then leave Cortona city centre and travel just outside Cortona to a wooded area where there is a peaceful Franciscan convent called the Convento delle Celle or Convent of the cells. The Celle location, which is nestled at the end of a wooded gorge halfway up the side of the Mount Egidio, has a convent near the mountain stream and waterfall, which houses 2 rooms where St Francis retreated for prayer and solitude, including his original stone slab bed and wooden pillow. St. Francis founded the monastery in the early 13th century, preaching here in 1211. From the convent there are good views of the valley below.

Noon: We travel about 30 minutes to Lago Trasimeno, the fourth largest and very beautiful lake of Italy, to the town of Passignano, and enjoy a fabulous casual lunch on the lake. We will then take a charter boat over to Isola del Maggiore, the second largest island of 3 islands on the lake, and the only one inhabited, called the island of Peace. St. Francis lived 40 days on this island as a hermit during Lent (probably 1211 although the date is unsure). The 12th century Church of Saint Michael the Archangel was built on the top of the hill. We will visit this church, experience the peace and breathtaking views and have a gentle walk following St. Francis' footsteps. Here is our opportunity to truly connect to nature as St. Francis did, and Roland will lead a meditation at the small church of St. Francis.

After a refreshing Gelato, about 4:30 we will return to Passignano and drive about an hour to Gubbio, and arrive about 6:30 PM, a wonderful medieval walled city, and significant in St. Francis' life. We will check into the Relais Ducale, Via Galeotti, 19, 06024 Gubbio PG, Italy, 011- 39 075 922 0157. Giampietro Rampini, Master Ceramicist, and a friend of deep spiritual faith, who creates the beautiful hand painted ceramics for Simpatico and Roland's "Love is Eternal Heirloom Ornament Collection", is our co-host in Gubbio.

After a brief break we will walk to dinner in a local restaurant at 8:00 PM (oldest restaurant in Gubbio). Upon returning to the hotel, Roland will hold a special gathering with all of us, sharing channeled messages he may receive, and inspirational discussion.

Day 3, Sept. 30th, Monday – After breakfast, at 9 AM we will form two groups to rotate between **Free time** exploring Gubbio and spending time in Rampini's Ceramics Workshop painting a dinner plate, which will then be fired and used at dinner the last night in Gubbio. Then we will regroup for lunch.

1:00 to 3:00 PM: We will enjoy a memorable lunch in town al fresco on a piazza at Luigi's Trattoria San Martino.

3:00 to 5:00 PM: We visit Chiesa Vittorina, the small church and statue of St. Francis which commemorates where St. Francis met the wolf that was terrorizing Gubbio, calmed him, and saved the town. Roland will discuss the teachings of St. Francis and how to incorporate them in our lives.

5:00 PM to 6:00 PM There will be an optional one hour tour of Gubbio on the train Gubbio-Express, for those who do not take the tour you will have **Free time**.

6:00 PM to 8 PM **Free time** to explore Gubbio shops and immerse yourself in this medieval atmosphere.

8:00 to 8:30 PM We will be transported in three cars for dinner and music at Rampini's friend's House the Tomassinis: Homemade Pizza of all types cooked in an authentic Pizza Oven, plates of other homemade foods and of course their own wine. (Rampini's family to join us). This is a priceless gathering of friends, family and our group for an evening of sharing cultures, laughter and friendship, regardless of language differences. After dinner a group of friends/musicians play for us all the wonderful Italian songs we love and there is even room for dancing. Love is the universal language here this evening.

Day 4, Oct. 1st, Tuesday – After breakfast, we will leave to visit La Verna about 10:00, known as sacred ground where St. Francis received the stigmata and where we will see the actual place the stigmata was received, beautiful Della Robbia works of art in the Basilica, as well as many other St. Francis related artifacts, holy places and artwork are here to be experienced.

We will have a family style lunch from 12:30 PM to 2 PM at the La Verna on site restaurant and then tour the many sacred spots including the Cave of Crosses, the Del Robbia artworks, the hallways of St. Francis' life, another cave of St. Francis, and then the location where St. Francis received the Stigmata. Here, Roland will share his spiritual insights of this special holy place and we will experience a silent walking meditation on the balcony overlooking the beautiful views of the valley. We will then enjoy free time to explore the church, the St. Francis relics and the gift shop. We then leave about 4:00 PM to walk back to the bus and return to Gubbio to arrive about 6:30 PM.

Free Time: Gubbio shops are open until 8 PM.

8:30 PM: We enjoy a special final dinner in Gubbio at the Taverna del Lupo and we will receive our plates at the table that we painted in Giampietro's workshop.

Day 5 Oct 2nd, Wednesday – We leave Gubbio about 9:15 AM and travel toward Assisi, to a town right at the base of Assisi and see the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli (Saint Mary of the Angels), which encloses the 9th century little church, the Porziuncola, the most sacred place for the Franciscans. It was here that the young Francis of Assisi understood his vocation and renounced the world in order to live in poverty among the poor and thus started the Franciscan movement, and here he passed from this life. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_of_Santa_Maria_degli_Angeli).

Noon - We will then go to lunch close by at a favorite local restaurant, and then drive on to the heart of Assisi and check into Hotel dei Priori, steps from the main Piazza del Commune and check in by about 3 PM.

We will walk to the Basilica, tour the upper and lower churches and the crypt where St. Francis is buried. On previous trips, a profound event took place due to Roland's connections with St. Francis was experienced, Roland will share with us on this trip should a similar connection occur.

We walk from the Basilica to the small church which was built over St. Francis' home. **Free Time** Enjoy the magic of Assisi.

7:30 PM Dinner in Assisi at one of our favorite restaurants "Piazza del Erba" within a short walk from the hotel.

Day 6, Oct 3rd, Thursday – After breakfast, we will leave at 9:00 to walk to the Rocca Maggiore at the top of Assisi where Roland will lead a blessing of the animals (bring pictures of your animals) and morning meditation. It's customary that in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi's love for all creatures, animals are led to churches for a special ceremony called the "Blessing of the Animals" on this day. We will then walk back to the Assisi Centre and enjoy Assisi sites and shopping until Lunch.

Lunch at Trattoria Pollatta in Piazza Comune at 12:30 PM.

After lunch, we will visit the Church of St. Clare and the Piazza del Vecovado where St. Francis denounced his father and turned over his worldly goods including all his clothes he had on that day so he could go and rebuild the Church as God asked him to do. There is a church in the piazza, Santa Maria Maggiore, we will also visit and go under the altar for a special prayer. **Free Time** until Dinner.

Dinner at 7:30 PM at Trattoria degli Umbri, just near the Piazza Comune.

After dinner, we will join in the pre- St. Francis Feast Day activities in the Piazza Comune, including drumming, dancing, music, fire throwing and flag throwing. It is an amazing medieval celebration of St. Francis.

Limoncello and Dessert at Vino on the Piazza Comune.

Day 7, Oct 4th, Friday – After breakfast in the hotel, at about 8:30 we will join the crowd in the Piazza Comune for the Feast Day of St. Francis. We will watch the gathering of the official parade of representatives from all over Italy as they begin the walk to the Basilica. We will then be picked up and driven just outside town to visit the Hermitage of St. Francis (Eremo delle Carceri) on the slope of Mount Subiaso. This is where the real St. Francis spirit lives. St. Francis and his friars came here to get away from the busyness of life, pray in silence and solitude, and be refreshed and recharged. The views are stunning, and to be able to walk where St. Francis walked, and be where he held prayer service at a special altar, see the cell where he slept, is pretty overwhelming.

We breathe in the wondrous nature and spiritual feelings in this holy place, and Roland shares his spiritual insights of our surroundings as we explore the area and grounds of the Hermitage. On the way back down the mountain, we will stop for lunch at a local restaurant at 12:30 PM, called La Stalla.

After lunch we visit San Damiano, built in the 12th century; it was the first monastery of the Order of St. Clare, and is where she built her "Poor Clares" Franciscan community. It is the site of 2 important miracles performed by St. Clare and her community. This is also where St. Francis had his significant encounter with God, when the cross spoke to him to "rebuild the Church".

4:00 PM Returning to Assisi, we will have **Free Time**. Assisi is full of wonderful galleries, gift shops, religious items, local crafts of olive wood, linens, etc.

At **about 5:00 PM** we leave to travel 12km outside of Assisi to the Locanda dell'Angelo for our memorable last night in the Assisi area. We will sit out on the patio and absorb the amazing views and

then have a special prayer service in their private Chapel of the Angels. In candlelight we will listen to Roland and Eugenio Picchiani, an Italian Rock Star whose family owns the Locanda, sing beautiful prayer hymns. Following this, we will have a fabulous family style dinner of Umbrian foods and wines. We will then return to Assisi for our last night in this magical city.

Day 8, Oct 5th, Saturday – We will visit one last significant site in Assisi, the Cathedral of San Ruffino, not only of architectural significance, but also is where the original baptismal font remained, which is said to be the one in which St. Francis and St. Clare were baptized.

We will then leave Assisi city centre and drive to Tili Vinyards, <http://www.tilivini.com/en/>, a local organic vineyard for wine tasting and tour, followed by a beautiful lunch overlooking a spectacular view. After lunch we will travel toward Narni and find magic at the Convento del Sacro Speco (Cave of St. Francis) and experience the peace and energy of this special sacred place. Roland will lead a prayer at the outdoor altar and we will leave our miracle requests in the book in the monastery complex, where St. Francis performed miracles.

After traveling a short distance to the Greccio area, we will check into the Hotel della Fonte, explore the beautiful grounds and have **Free Time** until dinner in the hotel. Greccio is where the Nativity scene or Christmas crib is said to have originated with Saint Francis in 1223 when he constructed a nativity scene out of straw in a cave in the town and held Christmas Eve mass there. Greccio reenacts this event each year and there's a collection of nativity scenes and a memorial to Saint Francis.

We will have dinner at Il Nido del Corvo and enjoy the beautiful view (Italy has no shortage of beautiful views!).

Day 9 Oct 6th, Sunday – After breakfast we will visit the Santuario di S. Francesco, the site of the Nativity and then leave the area to drive toward Rome.

We will eat a quick lunch on the way in our favorite A1 Auto Grille, and check into Hotel Victoria Roma, Via Campania, 41 I - 00187 Roma Tel. +39 06 423701 Fax. +39 06 4871890, located just off the Via Veneto. We will regroup and take you on a walking tour to The Museum and Crypt of Capuchins (Bones), the Spanish Steps, the Trinita dei Monti Church at the top of the Steps, and then everyone can explore the streets and shopping areas of this famous area of Rome.

7:30 PM We will walk to our special wind up dinner at Ristorante Vladimiro off the Via Veneto and then visit the Trevi Fountain after dinner to throw our coins in, to make sure we return to Rome someday again!

Day 10 Oct 7th, Monday – Leave for Home! Arrivederci Roma!

Alternate extensions of the trip to stay in Rome or visit other places in Italy can be arranged through a local Easton, MD travel agent, Barbie Smith, from Smith Travel on 410-822-5926. She helps our guests plan an extended stay and Bobbi can also make suggestions of an extended visit. Options include seeing Pope Francis on Sunday at his special weekly blessing and address at Noon in St. Peter's Square, tour of Rome, excursions to Pompeii or Florence, Tivoli and more. Barbie can also help with travel insurance.

Note: Schedule specifics subject to change.

For more information about Roland and his work, go to his Web site and FaceBook Page

www.rolandcomtois.net

www.facebook.com/ blessingsbyroland

Note: We will walk about 100,000 steps during our trip and many of the St. Francis retreat places require uphill walking. **Cost Details** will be posted on Roland's web site. The total per person for a double occupancy is \$4,495 and for a single is \$4895. Trip total costs include all hotels, transportation, tips, food and wine, entrance fees, tour guides and all special experiences with Roland. In order to register for one of the 12 maximum trip seats, a deposit of \$1,500 must be paid by March 1, 2019. Limited to 12 attendees plus Roland, Bobbi and a staff member. Payment can be made by check or credit card. For questions, call Bobbi on 610-209-5409.

.....